

Remember

Exodus 20:1-17

This is not the first time we have looked at the Ten Commandments and wondered out loud what they have to do with us as Christians who have been saved by grace. However, one of the central convictions of Jewish and Christian faith is that human life is to be lived before God and that such life has an order and structure, constituted by God's commandments.

In the Jewish and Christian stories of human origins, human life with God was and is structured by commandments. Humans were free to eat of every tree in the garden of Eden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen. 2:17). So too in Israel's history its covenantal life with God was ordered and structured by means of what the writer of Deuteronomy described as "the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the LORD our God has commanded you" (Deut. 6:20), the most important of which are the commandments given at Sinai (Exod. 20:2-17; Deut. 5:6-21). So we are to remember.

The Ten Commandments are written in the form of two tables, of which one has to do with how people are to live before God and the second with how they are to live with one another. That the commandments are given in two tables has great significance for Jewish and Christian life. The two tables differ, but they are also inseparable. It would be a profound mistake to emphasize one and ignore the other, to reduce the commandments to either religious theology or social ethics. Therefore, the two tables should not be

understood apart from one another, but as inseparable. **George W. Stroup**
Remember, remember.

This week's Exodus reading should be received not as a burden but a gift, an opportunity to grow deeper in relationship with God in Christ. During Lent, when we as Christians are called to remember and reflect on all the ways our lives do not embody the kingdom and fall short of Christ-likeness, this lesson provides a roadmap of faith on the journey toward Jerusalem. Remember, remember.

The story of the Ten Commandments comes after God has led the people through the Red Sea out of slavery in Egypt, sustained them with manna in the wilderness, and brought them to Mount Sinai. God had displayed a passionate love for his people and shown that love through liberating them from bondage and feeding them with bread from heaven. Remember, remember.

The Commandments come as gift from God to the people of Israel to structure their common life, and to shape individual lives that are worthy of the God who had rescued them and with whom they were in covenant. This is not divine finger-wagging or moral hand-slapping. To be bound in covenant with God is to be set free to live as God's people. God's gift of the law to Israel is a means of protecting the community, now that they are no longer slaves, and opening a path to the flourishing of life, both communal and individual. Remember.

Remember, the Ten Commandments are separated into two tablets or sections. The first tablet is God-centered, a set of injunctions against making false idols and taking the Lord's name in vain, and commandments to keep the Sabbath, and honor father and mother. These are commandments directed toward the individual in relationship with God ([vv. 3-12](#)). The

second tablet is neighbor-centered, forbidding murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting (vv. 13-17). The commandments outline the basic expectations of human behavior and protect the human community from falling into patterns of living that will destroy it and lead the people into self-inflicted chaos. At the same time, the commandments provide encouragement for a healthy and proper love of God and neighbor. Remember, remember.

The commandments teach us the way we attend to God (tablet one) and shapes the way we attend to our neighbor (tablet two). Therefore, faithful worship of God leads to proper love of neighbor. Proper praise of God shapes our social responsibility. For examples of how this structures our lives: having "no other gods before me" means that money, sex, and power will not wiggle their way onto the altars of our lives, and thus will not be used to exploit others. Keeping the Sabbath is a reminder that all of creation is a gift and we have a responsibility to be wise stewards of it (v. 8). Honoring father and mother reminds us that we are not self-made, that we stand on the shoulders of others (v. 12). Not bearing false witness suggests that we should build up the community by speaking truthfully of our neighbors (v. 16). "You shall not murder" suggests that others are gifts who bear the image of God for us (v. 13). And not taking the Lord's name in vain invites an attitude of praise and thanksgiving toward God, rather than anger and cynicism (v. 7). Remember, remember.

When we speak of repenting of our sin and becoming right with God during Lent, we are not simply saying that eight of the big ten have been checked off, and now, if we can just get that bit about Sabbath and coveting down, all will be fine. NO! When we fail to rest from our labor, or covet a friend's job, or tell a little lie, or stealing, or murder, or commit adultery, the

whole fabric of our relationship with God and one another is torn apart. The Ten Commandments were given to the people of Israel as a gift to shape their love of God and one another. Following the Commandments is an opportunity to confess the ways we have squandered God's gifts, to renew the liveliness and faithfulness of our worship, and to increase our love of neighbors near and far. Following the Commandments is a journey of deepening holiness shaping lives in the image of Christ to praise God and live in friendship with one another. **Craig Kocher** Remember, remember.

In Mark 12:28-34, when a scribe asks Jesus which commandment is "the first of all," Jesus summarizes the first four commandments (using the numbering of the Reformed tradition) by means of the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ("The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might"). However, Jesus recognized that was not the complete answer. And so, quoting Leviticus 19:18, Jesus said, "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Contrary to some forms of evangelical Christianity, one cannot love God without also loving one's neighbor; and contrary to some forms of theological liberalism and the social gospel, one cannot properly love one's neighbor unless that love is rooted in one's love of God. Remember, remember.

John Calvin (1509-64) described "three uses" for the Ten Commandments. First, in showing us how we are to live before God and with neighbor, they expose our sin, cutting through our self-deception that we really are "good" people and revealing some of the many ways in which our lives are not what they are supposed to be. Second, the Commandments serve an important civic function in that they restrain sin, which is never simply individual but always corporate, social, and institutional. Finally—

and Calvin said most importantly—the Commandments play an indispensable, positive role in Christian life. They are, as the Bible tells us, a "lamp unto our feet." They guide us as we journey in our life before God and our life with our neighbors. They do not show us what we must do or how we must live in order to receive God's covenantal grace. They light our way and show us how we should live as people who have already been freely given God's grace in Jesus Christ. It is that conviction that leads some Christians in their worship, following prayers of the confession of sin and the declaration of pardon, to stand and recite the Ten Commandments. They recite the Commandments not in order to receive God's forgiveness, but having already been freely forgiven, they recite the Commandments and teach them to their children in order to know how to live as God's people. Remember, remember. **George W. Stroup** Remember, remember.

In some part of the rural South, where the Ten Commandments are still posted in some county courthouses, citizens in favor of leaving them there often post them in their yards as well. The small signs contain facsimiles of two stone tablets printed in blue ink on white plastic board, with five commandments on each side. All things considered, the yard signs honor the First Amendment better than the courthouse signs do. The curious thing is that the people who care enough to display them can often be seen mowing around the signs on the Sabbath. Some have even been known to bear false witness against their neighbors, not all of whom appreciate the signs. Remember, remember.

Public defense of the Ten Teachings is no substitute for practicing them. The best plan may be to turn the signs around (or at least print them on both sides), so that those who commend God's directions to others remember to

follow the directions themselves. **Barbara Brown Taylor** Remember, remember.

Karl Barth (1886-1968) once wrote that we can recognize those who have the Holy Spirit. They are the ones who know themselves to be poor before God. They are "those in whose sinful, unclean hands the Gospel and the Law have been laid, not in vain but for their salvation, because, through the body of Christ crucified for us and his blood shed for us, they are fed and satisfied and sustained into eternal life." **George W. Stroup** Remember, remember.

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